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ABSTRACT

Directors of student teachers and administrators of field experience (n=240) assessed which of 26 suggested components of preservice/certification programs for rural teaching were available and which should be available. Results indicated that 21 of the 208 institutions in 27 rural states prepared students specifically for teaching in a rural environment. Fourteen of the suggested 26 components were currently available in over half of the institutions surveyed. The four components available at most institutions were: coursework in developing curriculum; training for work with exceptional children; coursework in educational technology; and training for teaching physical education, music, art, and community recreation. Although preservice programs were generally considered nonessential by respondents, the need for special preservice training for teaching in a rural environment was considered essential. Recommendations to implement preservice training programs for rural teaching or to upgrade existing ones related the components to six areas: general curriculum concepts; preparation for rural cultural, social, and economic factors; realities of teaching and living in isolated areas; availability of regional service centers; need for faculty specialization in rural education; and awareness of characteristics and needs of rural teachers and schools. Supporting tables are included and a brief directory of rural education resources is appended. (LFL)

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PRESERVICE PROGRAMS FOR TEACHING IN A RURAL ENVIRONMENT: SURVEY OF SELECTED STATES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of the Results and Recommendations

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Fall, 1985

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PRESERVICE PROGRAMS FOR TEACHING IN A RURAL ENVIRONMENT: SURVEY OF SELECTED STATES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of the Study

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the availability of preservice or certification programs for rural teaching in the 27 states defined as rural (Table 1). A secondary purpose of this research, based on the belief that there are unique competencies necessary for successful teaching in rural schools, was to examine preservice components which meet rural teacher needs. A third purpose of this study was to suggest ways to upgrade existing programs as well as recommend curriculum components for those who might select to implement a new preservice training program for rural environments. The Rural Education Association (REA) endorses this survey research.

Table 1

Persons per Square Mile and Rank Density for 27 Rural States

Rank Density	State	Persons per square mile
1	Alaska	.82
2	Wyoming	5.25
3	Montana	5.55
4	Nevada	8.06
5	South Dakota	9.09
6	North Dakota	9.62
7	New Mexico	11.50
8	Idaho	11.84
9	Utah	19.07
10	Nebraska	20.68
11	Arizona	26.01
12	Oregon	27.45
13	Kansas	29.48
14	Colorado	30.11
15	Maine	36.60
16	Arkansas	43.84
17	Oklahoma	47.17
18	Minnesota	49.29
19	Iowa	51.61
20	Mississippi	54.22
21	Vermont	54.64
22	Texas	59.98
23	Washington	63.06
24	Missouri	71.32
25	Alabama	76.71
26	West Virginia	81.26
27	Wisconsin	84.61

Note. Persons per square mile was calculated by dividing the 1983 estimated state population (Byerly, 1983) by the square mile figure from the Times Atlas of the World, 1980.

The population for this study was all directors of student teaching and administrators of field experience at 456 public and private institutions in the 27 rural states. The 240 respondents from the population represented the sample for this study. Telephone follow-up of nonrespondents indicated that the sample was representative of the population.

Descriptive survey research was selected as the most appropriate method to collect data. The survey instrument, a detailed questionnaire, was designed to collect the most current information regarding preservice programs which prepare teachers for a rural environment. Respondents were asked to indicate what suggested preservice components were available and what components should be available. Frequency distributions, stated as percentages, described how the sample responded for each component (Table 2). Means and standard deviations were ranked and used to describe what preservice components the respondents at institutions indicated should be available (Table 3).

Table 2
Preservice Components Available Compared with Ratings by Field Experience Administrators

Rank	Component	% Avail	% NA
1.	Develop curriculum	90.3	8.7
2.	Refer and/or teach exceptional children	89.4	7.2
3.	Educational technology	90.3	8.7
4.	Integrate curriculum	75.0	20.2
5.	General preparation	77.4	15.4
6.	Work with limited resources	63.9	31.3
7.	P.E., art, music	88.0	8.2
8.	Use community resources	65.3	27.4
9.	Field experience-- community service	68.3	26.9
10.	Recognize delinquency	71.6	22.6
11.	Field experience-- student teaching rural	76.0	20.2
12.	Competency-based preservice program	58.7	28.8
13.	Field experience-- rural observation	72.6	25.0
14.	Preparation for extra-curricular activities	46.1	45.7
15.	Field experience-- a rural internship	69.7	26.4
16.	Public relations	47.1	46.6
17.	Two or more grade levels in same classroom	39.4	51.0
18.	Gain access to information	43.8	47.6
19.	Vocational guidance	43.8	46.2
20.	Field experience-- living in rural area	39.0	55.3
21.	Use teacher training site	14.5	72.6
22.	Rural sociology	43.8	49.5
23.	Use regional service center	21.2	72.1
24.	Preservice rural ed program	10.1	89.9
25.	Rural politics	19.3	75.0
26.	Rural economics	24.1	49.5

Note. % Avail = electives, required for all, and required for rural education. % NA = percent never available.

Table 3
Essential Components for Preservice Rural Education Teacher Training Rated by Field Experience Administrators

Rank	Component	M	SD
1.	Develop curriculum	4.482	.845
2.	Refer and/or teach exceptional children	4.432	.895
3.	Educational technology	4.177	.904
4.	Integrate curriculum	4.026	.992
5.	General preparation	3.843	1.001
6.	Work with limited resources	3.775	1.069
7.	P.E., art, music	3.737	1.000
8.	Use community resources	3.689	.989
9.	Field experience-- community service	3.651	1.155
10.	Recognize delinquency	3.630	1.016
11.	Field experience-- student teaching rural	3.465	1.151
12.	Competency-based preservice program	3.451	1.215
13.	Field experience-- rural observation	3.418	1.135
14.	Preparation for extra-curricular activities	3.416	1.008
15.	Field experience-- a rural internship	3.381	1.182
16.	Public relations	3.312	1.129
17.	Two or more grade levels in same classroom	3.203	1.021
18.	Gain access to information	3.138	1.199
19.	Vocational guidance	2.984	1.093
20.	Field experience-- student teaching rural	2.940	1.190
21.	Use teacher training site	2.917	1.194
22.	Rural sociology	2.911	1.127
23.	Use regional service center	2.894	1.113
24.	Preservice rural ed program	2.823	1.223
25.	Rural politics	2.584	1.094
26.	Rural economics	2.550	1.059

Note. M based on scale 1 = Not Essential; 5 = Very Essential.

Results indicate that 21 of 208 public and private institutions in 27 rural states prepared students specifically for teaching in a rural environment. Results are similar to the findings of Muse (1977) and Dreier (1977). Results of the research disagree with the findingsd of Horn (1981), who stated that 33% of the institutions in 23 states reported having a rural education preservice program. Specific skills, experiences, and competencies for this study were taken from the research recommendations of Bandy (1980), Charles (1969), Gardener and Edington (1982), Horn (1981), Meier and Edington (1982), Oelschlager (1979), Oelschlager and Guenther (1983), Reed and Seyfarth (1984), and Traugh (1984).

The 26 suggested curriculum components listed on the survey instrument were ranked by mean scores of what should be essential and compared to the percentages of components currently available at institutions. The major findings showed that 14 of the suggested 26 preservice components (53.8%) were currently available in over half of the institutions surveyed (range 58.1% to 90.3%), and respondents indicated that the components should be available. Eight of the components were available in less than half of the institutions, and respondents indicated

that the components were not essential. The largest discrepancies existed for the following components: preparation for participation in extracurricular activities, coursework in public relations, training for teaching two or more grade levels in the same room, and gaining effective access to information. Respondents also indicated that a rural education preservice program was not essential, yet agreed that there was a need for special preservice training for teaching in a rural environment.

All 26 components were available as an elective, required for all students, required for students preparing to teach in a rural environment, or integrated into existing campus courses (range 10.1% to 90.3%). The four components available at most institutions (range 88% to 90.3%) included the following: coursework in developing curriculum, training to recognize and appropriatley teach and/or refer exceptional children, coursework in educational technology including computer literacy, and training for teaching physical education, music, art, and/or community recreation.

The majority (66.7%) of preservice training programs were found in public institutions. Most of these institutions were located in the Great Plains and the

Great Basin areas. Respondents at 49 public and private institutions indicated moderate or great impact on the institution's preservice program by the regional service center and/or the teacher training site in the state.

Recommendations for Directors of Student Teaching, Administrators of Field Experience, and Other Preservice Program Planners

Research findings in the literature suggested that rural teachers needed preparation different from that of urban teachers (Bandy, 1980; Charles, 1969; Gardener & Edington, 1982; Horn, 1981; Meier & Edington, 1982; Oelschlager, 1979; Oelschlager & Guenther, 1983; Reed & Seyfarth, 1984; Traugh, 1984). Suggested experiences and skills included teaching competencies, personal competencies, and administrative competencies. Preservice programs were considered nonessential by directors of student teaching and administrators of field experience, yet the need for special preservice training for teaching in a rural environment was considered essential. Based on the conclusions of this research, the following recommendations are provided for field experience

administrators and planners of programs who might select to implement a new preservice training program for rural environments or for those who might want to upgrade an existing program.

1. The following general curriculum components should continue to be offered or integrated into an existing preservice program for teachers selecting to teach in a rural environment:

a. coursework in developing curriculum
b. training to recognize and/or refer exceptional children
c. coursework in educational technology, including computer literacy
d. coursework which prepares teachers to integrate the curriculum
e. general coursework preparation rather than specialization
f. training for teaching physical, music, art, or community recreation
g. training for the recognition of possible delinquency problems

h. field experience--student teaching in a rural environment

i. provide a competency-based preservice program

j. field experience--rural observation

k. field experience--an internship in a rural area

l. training for teaching two or more grade levels in the same room

2. Because each area of the United States is unique in its cultural heritage, those planning to teach in a rural environment must be aware of the cultural, social, and economic factors involved in the rural areas (Gjelten, 1978; Ivey, 1979; Sher, 1977; Woofter, 1917). Attention in preservice planning depends upon the region being served. Institutions apparently provide a minimum of preparation for rural community life and community expectations. While the results of the recommendations from respondents in this survey differed from the recommendations of past researchers, program planners should consider implementing or integrating the following curriculum components:

a. preparation for the effective use of community resources (human and financial)
b. field experience--providing community service
c. preparation for participation in extracurricular activities
d. coursework in public relations
e. coursework in rural sociology, culture, or anthropology, rural politics, and rural economics

3. Respondents at institutions indicated that a minimum of preparation was provided for the realities of living and teaching in an isolated rural area. Program planners should consider implementing or integrating the following curriculum components:

a. training to teach with limited instructional resources
b. training in gaining effective access to information (e.g., literature available on the results of rural education research)

An optional component of field experience, living in a rural setting as preparation for the social isolation common in a rural environment, might be considered for those states with substantial sparsely populated areas (e.g., areas of western states).

4. Program planners should seek information concerning the availability of a regional service center and/or the teacher training site in some states. Creating off-campus centers, fostering cooperative relationships with neighboring rural schools and with state education agencies will provide the unique experiences and supplemental preservice training components required for students selecting to teach in a rural environment.

5. Research suggests a shift in the role of the campus professor. Drummond, Houston, and Massonari (1978) suggested that new roles included being linkers, reference sources, resource retrievers, instructional managers, diagnosers, and designers of programs and materials for nontraditional students. Results from this research indicated that faculty members are still generalists in preservice preparation. Specialization including field

experience, research, and attendance at rural education conferences should be considered by program planners.

6. Apparent discrepancies exist between suggestions from past research and the program practices at institutions of higher education found in this research. Although only 10.1% of public and private institutions provided a preservice program for rural teaching in the 27 rural states and respondents indicated that such a program was not essential, respondents indicated that there was a need for special preservice training for teaching in a rural environment. To alleviate any confusion, program planners need to review the research literature and continue to develop an awareness of the special characteristics and needs of rural teachers, rural communities, and rural schools. Organizations such as the Rural Education Association (REA), the Mid-continent Regional Educational Laboratory (McREL), and the ERIC Clearinghouse for Rural Education and Small Schools (CRESS) disseminate information and focus on rural education (Appendix).

In summary, program planners and administrators need to understand the unique skills and competencies necessary

for teaching in a rural environment, the unique circumstances of a rural community, the professional and social isolation experienced by teachers in some rural areas, and the supplemental support services provided in some states. It is recommended, therefore, that planners seek additional information concerning the program needs of preservice students and the availability of support services. It is further recommended that some special training be offered for nontraditional students preparing to teach in a rural area. Whether components are integrated into existing coursework or offered as a separate specialized preservice program depends on the cultural, social, and economic factors involved in the rural region of the United States being served and an assessment of the teaching needs of those rural environments.

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Appendix

Rural Education Resources

Center for Rural Education and Small Schools
Attn: Jerry G. Horn
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College of Education
Manhattan, KS 66506

Center for Rural Education and Small Schools
Attn: Dr. Roger Hanson, Director
Kearney State College
Kearney, NE 68849

Center for Research on Rural Education
Attn: John W. Kohl
Montana State University
250 Reid Hall
Bozeman, MT 59717

ERIC/CRESS
ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Samll Schools
Attn: Betty Rose D. Rios, Associate Director
Box 3AP
New Mexico State University
Las Cruces, NM 88003

McREL
Mid-Continent Regional Educational Laboratory
Attn: Mr. Paul Nachtigal
3000 Youngfield, Suite #263
Lakewood, CO 80033

National Center for Smaller Schools
Attn: Weldon Beckner
Texas Tech University
College of Education
Box 4560
Lubbock, TX 79409

National Rural Project
Attn: Dr. Doris Helge
National Rural Development Institute
Western Washington University
Bellingham, WA 98225

North Central Regional Center for Rural Development
Attn: Ronald C. Powers
Iowa State University
108 Curtiss Hall
Ames, IA 50011

PURE
People United for Rural America
Attn: Joyce Losure, President
RR #1, Box 3S
Kanrar, IA 50123

Southern Rural Development Center
Attn: William W. Linder, Director
Mississippi State University
Box 5406
Mississippi State, MS 39762

Rural Based Teacher Development
Attn: Harvey Bennett, Director
Eastern Oregon State College
La Grande, OR 97850

REA
Rural Education Association
Attn: Dr. Joe Newlin, Executive Director
Colorado State University
Education Department
300 Education Building
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Rural Education Center
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Western Montana College
College of Education
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